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CHAPTER SIX

THE RULES OF KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

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When a Lepcha speaks of 'we' he generally means all the people of his village. But besides these geographical divisions Lepchas are divided up into other groups by birth and marriage; these groups are the patrilineal clan, or *ptso*, and the immediate and extended family. Unlike their neighbours, the Nepali, the Lepchas have a very small number of kinship terms;[1] fewer even than we have, for they exclude all the category of cousins, and, except for the mother's brothers, make no distinction between the paternal and maternal lines. For people younger than the speaker, too, they do not make any distinction of sex; the same word is used for a younger brother or a younger sister, for a son or a daughter, for a nephew or a niece. Only in the case of children's spouses are different words used for son-in-law and daughter-in-law.

Old age is considered by the Lepchas to be a desirable quality; the polite term of address to anybody you are not related to is 'old man'; and there is a tendency to push anybody older than the speaker into a higher generation. Thus, when a man has had a child he calls his wife's parents 'grandfather' and 'grandmother', and the parents call their own elder brothers and sisters 'father' and 'mother'; the wife's elder brother, or her elder sister's husband (and conversely) are equated with her father. The opposite tendency is also manifested towards the wives of younger brothers (the elder brother calls them 'daughters-in-law') and the husbands of younger sisters (the elder sister calls them 'sons-in-law'). In the joint family which dwells under a single roof only nine terms are normally used: 'grandfather', 'grandmother', 'father',

[1] A complete list of Lepcha kinship terms and other common forms of address are given in Appendix II.

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551 784 mention the names of his parents or parents-in-law; a man should never mention the name of those women he calls daughter-in-law (that is the wives of his sons, of his younger brothers, and of his brother's sons), nor a woman the names of those men she calls 'son-in-law' (that is her daughter's husbands, her younger sisters' husbands, and the husbands of her sisters' daughters). These prohibitions hold good even after a person is dead; but here likewise there is no avoidance of the same or similar-sounding words in ordinary conversation. To call a person by name, rather than [576] by their title or a kinship term is considered to be somewhat ill-mannered; it has the same effect as though one were treating him as a child or inferior. In Europe a parallel situation is created when a stranger is immediately addressed by his or her Christian name; it is classing that person as a child or a servant.

601 It is difficult to gauge the emotional weight which is carried by terms primarily employed in the immediate family when they are applied to more distant connections. My impression is that the use of such terms as 'mother' and 'father' does carry, and is intended to carry, some of the emotional attitudes derived from the original application of the terms. No child who was able to talk had any doubt as to who were his real father and mother, but many would say 'I have two mothers; my real mother is little mother.'

601 602 Among the Lepchas the crucial situation arises when a young man lives in the same house as the wife of his father's younger brother. If these two lived in different houses the woman would be a potential spouse for the boy; he would call her *azong* and would have the right to sleep with her. But if they live in the same house he will call her 'mother' and, on account of the emotions of respect and incest surrounding the term, is meant to respect her. In Lingthem there were five or six young men in this situation, and I was not, in any of the cases, able to decide to my own satisfaction whether they did or did not sleep with their 'little mothers'. In the presence of other people they would always deny doing so, for they would be ashamed to say otherwise; three or four confessed privately to having done so, but all on later occasions tried to withdraw or modify their statement, saying for example that though they had slept together they had not done anything. Third parties would never speculate on such private behaviour; to direct questions they would reply with the catch-phrase 'Who can read what is in the heart of another?' Such behaviour, though

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considered rather shameless, is not stigmatised as incestuous or even immoral, and there are no sanctions against it. The boy is meant to respect the name of 'mother', but whether he does or not, 'depends entirely on the hearts of the two people concerned.'

A Lepcha is expected to respect his parents and grand-parents, his parents-in-law, and his sons- and daughters-in-law. Of these 'respect-full' situations by far the most important is that between a Lepcha and his parents-in-law. A person is more respectful to his spouse's parents than to his own; he uses more honorific words to them and is careful never to use directly obscene language in front of them. A person must never witness his parents-in-law copulating nor must he be seen doing so by them. Should either of these situations arise the elders will be ashamed and angry.

The tensest of all situations, and one which lasts during the whole life-time of both parties is the relation between a man and his wife's mother, and a woman and her husband's father. These relationships are always rather strained and uncomfortable. If for instance a man's mother-in-law says something immodest, the man himself will feel uncomfortable, and may get up and go away. For a man the situation is most uncomfortable in the period between his betrothal and his bringing his wife home. During that period he has to spend about half his time in his father-in-law's home, helping him in his work; he is almost treated as a servant, under the orders of his father-in-law; and has to be modest and circumspect in his speech and behaviour; the male relations of his wife on the other hand have complete licence to tease him as much as they will and to use every sort of obscene term; if he is provoked into answering back he is humiliated. A woman when she first comes to her husband's house is also delicately situated; but after the actual marriage feast there is no licenced teasing of the bride and, if she is living continually in the same house as her father-in-law, the strain, though it never quite wears off, is considerably lessened. Once he has brought his wife home a man still has to avoid the crudest sexual phrases in front of his parents-in-law; but it is considered a rather amusing and risky game to sail as near the wind as possible.

In theory equal modesty of speech and behaviour should be shown in front of one's own parents and siblings of the opposite sex, but in point of fact in Zongu it is not; one of the things that most shocked our Lepcha servants, who came from the mixed

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this is done the husband and wife must each carry away their own image and throw it into the forest. The cost of this service is either Rs. 3 a head or enough grain for two months. This ceremony, however, only postpones the ill-luck for two or three years, after which it must be repeated.

As can be seen, these spaced visits are carefully arranged to make the bride's severance from her family as gentle as possible. It is only very exceptionally, as in the case of Nariya described above, that after the marriage ceremony the bride will refuse to return to her husband's house. It is also worth noting that until well after the ceremony the parents of the children being married play no rôle whatsoever.

The marriage feast represents very considerable expense—if everything had to be bought somewhere between Rs. 200 and Rs. 300; for most people this entails saving up for a couple of years. Nearly everybody who can provides this feast; in the case of very poor people general contributions will be made such as were outlined in Chapter Six.[7] In the case of a *komok myok*—that is a man living with his wife's family and taking the place of the non-existent son—the feast is very much smaller and is chiefly provided by the girl's family.

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The newly married girl is likely to find herself in a somewhat subservient position; it is her task to do the cooking and most of the household chores under the direction of the 'house mother', who is almost always her mother-in-law. She also has to maintain constantly respectful behaviour towards her father-in-law and the other men—her husband's elder brothers and her husband's father's brothers if they live in the house—who are so classified. If her husband is not the youngest brother she will only have this subservient position until the younger brothers marry; then their wives in their turn will occupy the position of youngest daughter-in-law and have to do the greater part of the household work. There is usually considerable friendliness between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law; the daughter-in-law is taking a lot of work off her mother-in-law's shoulders and in return the mother-in-law instructs her and cajoles her to keep her happy.

There is no bar on the girl paying relatively frequent visits to her parents; she need not necessarily be accompanied by her

[7] See Chapter Six, p. 156.

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159 Mandal, however, they represented the height of comfort,
622 and he begged me to give him one as a parting gift. This I did; and the last view I had of him was as he disappeared into the forest, with the chair perched precariously on his head.

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602 Although extremely laborious it would be possible to show, by means of charts, the connection between the various people of Lingtem. Nearly everybody is related, either by blood or marriage, to everyone else. In a general account such as this, however, these details would not make for easy reading, and I propose therefore to reserve them for publication in some appropriate scientific journal.

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would be a pity; but no one can wish to see them preserved as mere "museum specimens," which is what they are at present. After this short digression on possible improvements let us now return to the subject of agriculture.

Rice terraces are used every year; but it is usual to plant a different one of the six or seven varieties in use each year, as this is considered to be less exhausting to the ground. Dal, or pulse, which is the almost invariable accompaniment to cooked rice in the greater part of India, cannot here be grown on account of the coldness of the climate. The Mandal thinks that compared with "dry" cultivation the terraces give a slightly higher yield per acre: moreover, once made they are easier to work and less liable to damage by cattle. They can also be ploughed; whereas all other cultivation, except the few more level fields around the house, has to be laboriously prepared by hand. For this purpose a large hoe, with its blade turned at right angles to the handle, is the only tool in use, as is also the case in most parts of Nepal which I have visited. Not every man possesses a plough; but it is always possible to borrow a neighbour's, giving one's labour in payment when required.

Most of the crops in Lingtem are grown in fields which are used only once in every eight years, after which they are allowed to revert to forest. This system is very common in Assam, where it resulted in the complete deforestation of large areas before it could be controlled. In Lingtem, however, it is at least not harmful; for owing to the abundant rainfall the forest grows again in the course of four or five years. This is not to say, however, that more productive use could not be made of the land.

5th April:

We heard that Jiroong was sowing his dry rice this morning and accordingly went to investigate. This involved a steep climb for some five or six hundred feet above the monastery. In addition to Jiroong and his wife (plus the babies, who were left to play), there were present also

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243 Tobgay (his adopted son) and wife, his brother-in-law
[602] (Tempa), and one or two others, all relations of one sort or another. Working in an adjacent patch of forest was an old woman, her adopted son and his wife. The ground was being prepared by means of billhooks, but hoes were also in use. As soon as the undergrowth has been cut away the jungle is burnt and the ground lightly scratched, but not properly turned over. The larger trees are left standing; but the branches are lopped and only the leaves at the top of the tree are left. This is to ensure that they grow again next year, when the land reverts to forest. The ground was the steepest
[311] I have ever seen used for cultivation: in some places it was so steep that it was difficult to stand. Here and there long lengths of wood had been laid along the ground and held in position with pegs: this in an attempt to sheer up the hillside in the steepest places. At the lowest level of the field millet had already been planted: to-day rice was being sown in the central portion, and to-morrow they will plant the top section with maize. Once the planting of a field with rice is commenced it must be finished the same day, or the demons will cause it harm. The rice planted to-day will be reaped in September, when this field will then be used for buck-wheat. This will be ready in December, after which this particular land will lie fallow for another eight years.

243 Jiroong says that the group of people who own adjacent
571 pieces of forest always arrange to cultivate them in the same year; that is to say, the people who are working the fields on either side of Jiroong to-day will be beside him again next year, but in a different part of the forest.

476 Boundaries between fields are roughly marked with stones;
423 but in actual practice an area of this sort is worked as though
243 it was one large field. When people help each other in the fields they do not receive any payment, but are given food during the day. But all help is, of course, reciprocal.

243 The method of sowing was as follows: One person moved slowly along with a stick in each hand. With these two sticks he made a hole a few inches deep into which a second person,

23: Benedict
184, 192, 582, 591, 602, 611, 613, 614, 616, 618, 621

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/For lists of kinship terms, and for excellent and detailed information concerning correlations between kinship terminology, patterns of behavior, and social institutions, see category 601./